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An interesting Terracotta Plaque from Ahicchatra (U.P.)

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CALCUTTA

An interesting Terracotta Plaque from Ahicchatrā (U.P.)

[PLATE 1]

Ahicchatrā, in Bareilly District, United Provinces, where excavations were conducted from 1940 to 1944 by Rao Bahadur K. N. Dikshit, yielded a large number of terracotta figurines and plaques. One of the plaques (2′2″ × 2′4′), which on stylistic grounds has been assigned to a period between A.D. 450 and 650, hails from a Śiva temple and has received elaborate description at the hands of Dr. V. S. Agrawala, who has published an interesting paper on the "Ahicchatrā terracottas" in the *Ancient India*[1]. The plaque reveals a battle scene in which two archers, similarly attired, equipped and mounted on chariots are engaged in an archery combat. Each chariot is drawn by two horses and has a driver (*sārathi*). The *sārathi* of the chariot on the left cannot be made out, as the part of the chariot where he had his seat is broken and missing. Between the chariots is a drummer (*dundubhika*) beating the war-*dundubhi*. The warriors wear each a high and elaborate turban, carry four quivers of arrows, two at the shoulders and two at the thigh-sides and a *channavīra* on the chest. What makes the scene interesting is that the emblem of each warrior is shown on the standard (*dhvaja*) of each, a boar on that of the left and a crescent (*candrakalā*) standing for the moon (*Soma*) on that of the right. The standard supporting *Soma* with its tripod stand can be noticed in the plaque, while the standard that supported the boar has fallen, the abacus-part below the boar alone remaining. A vertical line running below the boar indicates the background of the standard that originally existed. In both the banners the fastenings, flags and tassels can be seen fluttering. The battle scene with the occurrence of the boar was tempting enough to lead Dr. Agrawala into its identification as from the *Kirātārjunīya* story in which, according to him "Śiva as a wild hunter had to take up arms against Arjuna to establish his right to a boar." But the occurrence of the boar on the standard of the warrior on the left where it can be least

1 No. 4, p. 171 and pl. LXVI.

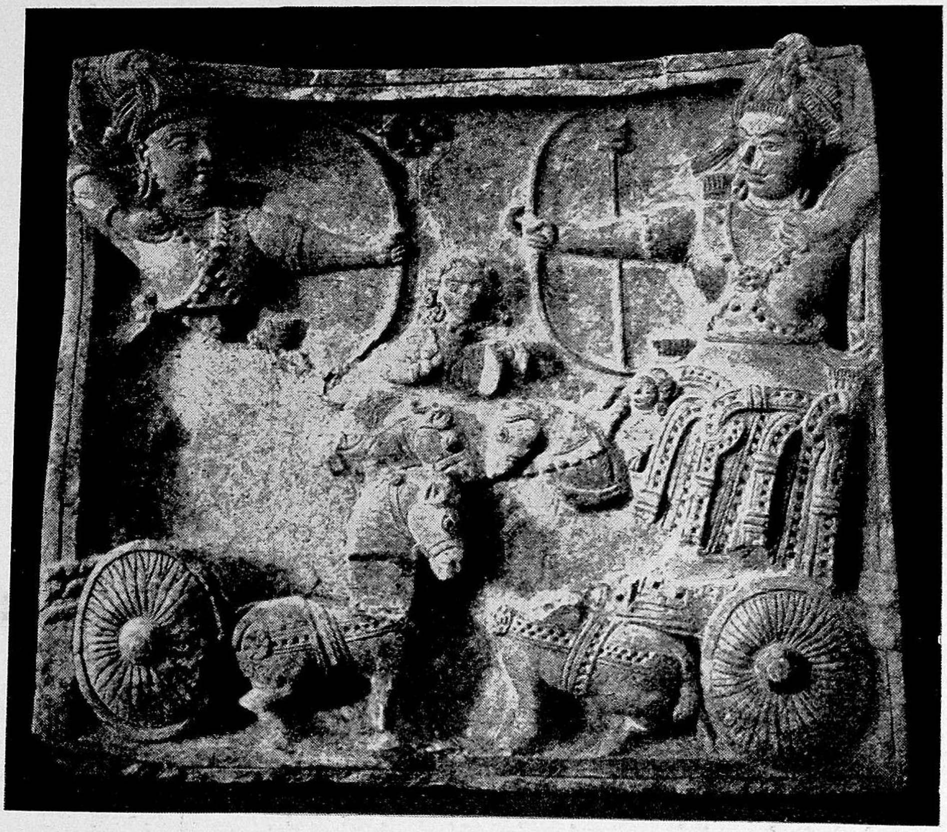
expected if the event related to the *Kirātārjunīya*, the standard on the right with the crescent-moon (*Soma*), which can neither mark Śiva nor Arjuna, the two chariots with the warriors standing one in each for which there is no place in the Kirāta-Arjuna feud, the similarity between the two fighters in dress, turban, *channavīra* and ornaments which go against the penitent (*tapasvī*) Arjuna's fight with Śiva in *Kirāta-veṣa* and the presence of a drummer in the centre of the combat as in a battle-field go against this identification.

The boar formed the emblem of Jayadratha[2] in the *Mahābhārata* and the crescent-moon or *Soma* marked the standard of Dharmaputra[3] among the Pāṇḍavas. The scene appears to have been drawn from the *Mahābhārata* and to relate to the epoch-making fight between Jayadratha and Dharmaputra, when the latter attempted to follow Abhimanyu into the *Padmavyūha* that Abhimanyu broke through. The *Mahābhārata* records that Jayadratha resisted the Pāṇḍava brothers successfully and prevented them from following Abhimanyu into the *vyūha* that he had penetrated, by virtue of a boon that Śiva granted him[4].

In view of the importance of the *Mahābhārata* event for the correct interpretation of the Ahicchatrā plaque in question, the Jayadratha-Dharmaputra feud against the background of the *Saṁśaptaka-vadha parva*, *Abhimanyu-vadha parva*, *Pratijñā parva* and *Jayadratha-vadha parva* of the *Droṇa Parva* is described below:—

When at Kurukṣetra, Arjuna, accompanied by Kṛṣṇa, had gone against the Saṁśaptaka hosts, leaving the charge of the battle in the hands of Dharmaputra and his other brothers. Droṇa arranged his troops in a circular array (*padma-vyūha*) and exerted himself to capture Dharmaputra. Dharmaputra resisted Droṇa and his array by dispensing his troops in a counter-array. The impregnability of Droṇa's array and the superior onslaught of Droṇa's troops began to tell upon the Pāṇḍava troops soon who were not even able to look at Droṇa's divisions, not to speak of breaking through the circular array (*padma-vyūha*) in which Droṇa had arranged them. When Dharmaputra was thus in despair it struck him that Abhimanyu,

2 *Mahābhārata, Bhīshma parva*, XVII, v-30.
3 *Ibid., Droṇa parva*, XXIII, v-81.
4 *Ibid., Droṇa*, ch. LXXIII, vv. 1-12.



FIGHT BETWEEN JAYADRATHA AND YUDHIṢṬHIRA
From a Śiva Temple in Ahicchatrā, U.P.

whose valour was not inferior to that of Vāsudeva's son but perhaps superior to that of his sire Arjuna himself, could alone check Droṇa's onslaught and break through the *padma-vyūha*. Entrusting this heavy task on the young shoulders of Subhadrā's son (i.e. Abhimanyu), Dharmaputra encouraged him thus:—"O Abhimanyu! you, or Arjuna, or Kṛṣṇa or Pradyumna, can penetrate into the *padma-vyūha*. I do not find a fifth man who can do it. Smite down this array of Droṇa so that your father Arjuna may not have reason to reproach us when he returns from the fight with the Saṁśaptakas. It behoves you to grant the boon that your sires, your uncles and all these troops beg of you"[5]

Abhimanyu, though in his teens, gladly undertook this task, after duly apprising Dharmaputra that Arjuna had taught him how to penetrate the *padma-vyūha* but that he did not know how to get out of the *vyūha*, if per chance any danger should overtake him within. Dharmaputra assured the boy as—"Pierce this array, create an opening for us. Pursuing the track you shall create, we will follow you closely and protect you from all sides[6]".

Abhimanyu needed no further assurance and cut through the enemy's array (*vyūha*) with the following war-cry in his mouth:—

> *Nāhaṁ Pārthena jātaḥ syām naca jātaḥ Subhadrayā /*
> *Yadi me saṁyuge kaścit jīvito nādya mucyate / /*[7]
>
> "I will not consider myself as begotten of Arjuna, or born of Subhadrā, if today, encountering me in the battle-field, any foe escapes with his life".

He fulfilled the task that Dharmaputra entrusted to him, and slaughtered his foes so very quickly and surely that none stayed in the battle-field except Jayadratha, King of the Sindhus, who placing himself in the opening created by Abhimanyu in the *vyūha*, checked the entry of Dharmaputra and his troops so very successfully that Dharmaputra and his troops could not follow Abhimanyu, much less protect him on all sides or rescue him when within the *vyūha*. Six generals of Duryodhana—Droṇa, Kṛpa, Asvatthāmā, Karṇa, Kṛtavarman and the king of the Kośalas, all great

5 *Mahābhārata, Droṇa parva, adhyāya* 35, vv. 14-17
6 *Ibid.*, vv. 20-21.
7 *Ibid.*, v. 27.

warriors of course (*Rathāḥ*), surrounded him, gave him an unfair battle and cut him down. With tremendous odds against him and surrounded by six great warriors as he was, Abhimanyu fell down dead under the last and fatal blow from the club of Duḥśāsana's son, who now joined Abhimanyu's assailants.

When Dharmaputra led the army on the day that Abhimanyu was to penetrate the *padma-vyūha*, people were astonished to note such a display by him of martial valour and leadership that it finds due mention made by Dhṛtarāṣṭra in *Droṇa parva*, *adhyāya* 24, vv. 3-4.

Dīrgham viproṣitaḥ kālam = araṇye jaṭilo'jinī /
Ajñātaścaiva lokasya vijahāra Yudhiṣṭhiraḥ / /
Sa eva mahatīm senām samāvartayadāhave /
Kimanyad = daivasamyogān-mama putrābhavāya ca / /

"Even that Yudhiṣṭhira, who wandered long in exile in the forests, with matted locks and deer-skin and also had to wander *incognito*, is now leading this mighty army in battle! Nothing but evil can befall my son through this adverse influence of Fate !"

In his hands Dharmaputra held a bow called Mahendra[8] while his standard bore the emblem of the moon surrounded by the planets[9]. Though Dharmaputra fought with fury, neither he nor his brothers (excepting Arjuna) nor the Matsyas, the Kekayas and the Pāñcālas could resist Jayadratha nor remove him from the rent created by Abhimanyu in the *vyūha* which he was effectively blockading against them standing on a single car and single-handed. Everyone from the Pāṇḍava-army who tried to penetrate through Droṇa's *vyūha* in the wake of the rent created by Abhimanyu was checked by Jayadratha in consequence of a boon that the latter had obtained from Mahādeva. Once Jayadratha abducted Draupadī when her husbands were away in the forest. Arjuna and Bhīma gave hot chase and rescued her after defeating Jayadratha. Bhīma further humiliated him by shaving off his hair on the head with a *nārāca* but took care to leave five patches of hair on his head in an ironic token that they were spared by the five

8 *Ibid.*, XXIII, 92.

9 *Ibid.*, v. 85—

dhvajam tu Kururājasya Pāṇḍavasya mahaujasaḥ/
dṛiṣṭavān = asmi sauvarṇam Somaṁ grahagaṇānvitam//

brothers as an act of clemency. In that condition Bhīma dragged him before Dharma and Draupadī and forced him to seek their forgiveness. Unable to forget this humiliation Jayadratha did severe penance and propitiated Mahādeva, who pleased, asked him to demand the boon he liked. Jayadratha's boon was that he should be able to check in battle on a single car and single handed, the Pāṇḍavas. The god answered: "O Jayadratha! So be it for a day, except in the case of Dhanañjaya (Arjuna). You shall vanquish in battle the other four Pāṇḍavas for a day[10]".

The *padma-vyūha*, and Abhimanyu's entry into it followed by the attempt of the four Pāṇḍavas under the leadership of Dharmaputra afforded Jayadratha the long cherished opportunity to stand in the breach of the *vyūha*, vanquish for a day Dharmaputra and his brothers *minus* Arjuna and enable Abhimanyu's assailants within the *vyūha* to make short work of that young warrior-son of Arjuna. Sañjaya describes graphically the victorious form and battle array of Jayadratha, who rode on a splendid car resembling an aerial castle with a mighty standard decked with the device of an argentine boar.[11] And Dharmaputra offered battle and assailed him with fury and anxiety for Abhimanyu, whom he could not follow into the *vyūha* as promised, so powerful was Jayadratha's defence. What followed was the unfair annihilation and death of Abhimanyu within the *vyūha* and the lamentation of Dharmaputra which Arjuna heard on his return in the night to camp. Arjuna made instantly a formidable vow to slay Jayadratha before sun-set on the following day, failing which he would commit suicide by entering into blazing fire.[12] On

10 *Ibid.*, adh. 42, vv. 14-21.
Pāṇḍaveyān ahaṁ saṁkhye bhīmavīryaparākramān/
vārayeyam rathenaikaḥ samastāniti Bhārata//19//
Dadāmi te varaṁ saumya vinā Pārthaṁ Dhanañjayam/
vārayiṣyasi saṁgrāme caturaḥ Pāṇḍunandanān//20//
ekāhamiti Rājendra tatraivāntaradhīyata/

11 *Mahābhārata, Droṇa, adh.* 43, v. 3—
(Tasyābhy=aśobhayat ketur=vārāho rājato mahān//

12 *Mahābhārata, Droṇa, adh.* 73; vv. 27-29, 53—
Satyaṁ vaḥ pratijānāmi śvo'smi hantā Jayadratham//27//
Pāpam bālavadhe hetuṁ śvo'smi hantā Jayadratham//29//
Yadyasmin na hate pāpe sūryo'stam=upayāsyati/
ihaiva sampraveṣṭāham jvalitaṁ jātavedasam//53//

hearing this vow Jayadratha offered to leave the battle-field the next day and the service of Duryodhana unless he was promised protection by Droṇa and Aśvatthāmā. Droṇa put him in an invincible array and gave him protection by placing Karṇa, Asvatthāmā, Bhūriśravas, Kṛpa, Vṛṣasena, and the Madra King in the van of the array. Arjuna found it difficult to get at Jayadratha, who, desirous of saving his life, was placed in the rear amidst the six warriors mentioned above, without vanquishing all of whom Arjuna could never get access to Jayadratha. Kṛṣṇa employed a ruse and created a mock sun-set by means of his Yoga-prowess. A veil of darkness covered the Sun. Now Jayadratha came out of his hiding place, thinking that the Sun had set, looked back with relief and was enjoying the spectable of the setting Sun, when at Kṛṣṇa's bidding Arjuna got ready. And Kṛṣṇa releasing forthwith the veil of darkness, the Sun appeared again as on the point of going to the western hills. Instantaneously and at Kṛṣṇa's bidding Arjuna shot forth a shaft from his *gāṇḍīva* which snatched away the head of Jayadratha and tossed it into the lap of his father Vṛddhakṣatra, who was then seated in his evening meditation and did not notice it. When Vṛddhakṣatra rose, Jayadratha's head rolled down and as it reached the earth the head of his father cracked into pieces. This was by virtue of a boon that whosoever caused Jayadratha's head to fall on the earth, his own head will crack into pieces[13].

Applying the details given above to the plaque it is easy to make out:—

1. the *varāha* standard of Jayadratha on the left and the crescent-moon standard of Dharmaputra on the right and to determine the fighters as Jayadratha on the left and Dharmaputra on the right,
2. that both the fighters are in a deadly-combat with resolve, fury and self confidence reflected in their faces, the justification for such feelings in the case of Jayadratha being his knowledge of the boon granted to him by Śiva for a day's victory over the Pāṇḍavas *minus* Arjuna, and in the case of Dharmaputra being his anxiety to enter the breach in the *vyūha* effected by Abhimanyu and protect

13 *Mahābhārata, Droṇa, adh.* 147, vv. 63-74; *adh.* 148, vv. 18-23.

Abhimanyu and his confidence of easy victory over the blockading Jayadratha whom he calls 'puny' (*kṣudra*)[14], and

3. that the plaque reveals great care that the artist took to juxtapose the fighters including their weapons, ornaments, dress, hands, faces (including the angle of faces), and their chariots, horses and the chariot-wheels on either side of a drummer aligned in the centre and presenting a frontal study while the fighters offer a side study.

Surely it was a day of triumph for Jayadratha fortified as he was by Śiva's boon, while to Dharmaputra it was an equally important day when he should fight, however disinclined he may be to fight, not so much because he was the leader of the Pāṇḍava army and much more so in the absence of Arjuna who was busy elsewhere annihilating the Saṁśaptakas, but also or mainly because of his supreme need of the moment to rush into the *vyūha* for the promised protection of Abhimanyu. Affection for his brother's son Abhimanyu, moral obligation to render him the promised aid, and fear from Arjuna's reproaches should any mishap over-take his beloved son Abhimanyu, coupled with his own responsibility as the leader of the army for the day in the absence of his valorous brother Arjuna —all these have combined to make the ascetic-king Ajātaśatru *alias* Dharmaputra achieve the antithesis of the defiant, valiant fighter Yudhiṣṭhira.

The *Mahābhārata* records that a sacrificial stake (*yūpa*) with the moon (Candra) marked the standard of King Saumadatti. As such one may wonder if the standard of the fighter on the right, whom I have identified as Dharmaputra cannot be of Saumadatti. Against this view stand the facts that Saumadatti and Jayadratha were friends in Duryodhana's service, that Saumadatti's opponent in the Pāṇḍava army was Sātyaki whose standard bore a lion and that there is no *yūpa* or sacrificial stake below the Candra in the plaque but the staff-part of a standard.

Such is indeed the spirit of the terracotta plaque from Ahiccha-

14 *Ibid*., 73, v-9—
Jātaḥ Saindhavako rājā Kṣudras-tāta Jayadrathaḥ/
Varadānena Rudrasya sarvān naḥ samavārayat //9//

trā which, when interpreted in the light of the *Mahābhārata* event discussed, above, makes it (both its *intent* and *content*) as one of high epic, iconographic and artistic importance.

In his anxiety to bring the scene on the plaque nearer to historic times, Dr. Agrawala has made an alternative suggestion wholly gratuitous, viz.,that the fight is perhaps one between Harṣa of Kanauj, under whose influence Ahicchatrā came, and a Cāḷukya king, either Vinayāditya Satyāśraya (688-95 A.D.) or Pulakeśin. This identification is also defective as the boar-crest of the Cāḷukya alone is accounted for but not the crescent-moon standard of the opponent. Nor should we forget that the plaque may be earlier than the event of Harṣa-Cāḷukya encounter as Dr. Agrawala assigns to the plaque a date with an upper limit of A.D. 450 and a lower limit of 650 A.D.

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